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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000054

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PINR SCUL SOCI IZ

SUBJECT: BG CARDON AND TL ENGAGE NAJAF GOVERNOR ON SECURITY

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¶1. (U) This is a PRT Najaf Cable.

¶2. (S) Summary: On the margins of meeting with Najaf authorities on May 10 to discuss the airport (see septel), BG Cardon and TL met with Governor Asad to discuss the security situation in Najaf. The Governor noted that he had not yet heard back about a possible Sadrist meeting with Team Leader. Governor Asad said he would welcome a visit by Ambassador Crocker to FOB Endeavor for the opening of the PRT. End summary.

¶3. (S) BG Cardon opened by noting that there had been reports of JAM special group leaders coming to Najaf from Basrah and Sadr City along with weapons, and that while there had always been some reporting of this kind, the number of reports had dramatically increased. In addition, the IA 8th Division Commander MG Uthman was concerned by recent reports. BG Cardon asked the Governor for his security assessment. The Governor replied that he had no precise information, but that he had discussed the situation with MG Uthman and the ODA commander. The Governor covered the disposition of the Iraqi Army in Najaf, pointing out that more forces are outside the city to protect the approaches. He mentioned that he had just replaced the police chief in Munathera after an IED incident and had asked the new chief to provide a report on the incident. Governor Asad promised that he would pass the report on if any specific information were developed. He also responded that if the authorities have a warrant, they will go and pick up the individuals, but otherwise they can't act. With respect to Moqtada al-Sadr's assassinated brother-in-law Sayid al-Nuri, the Governor said that he had received the day before over the internet a letter saying that al-Nuri had asked Moqtada to dissolve the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) and implied that this had played a role in his death. The Governor said, "frankly, through other leaders we are trying to talk the Sadrists into dissolving the JAM" and that Grand Ayatollah Sistani also supports dissolving Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). He added that the GOI had sent people to Iran to exert pressure and that religious scholars were supporting this process. Asad also stated that no one will be allowed to take part in the election if they are a member of JAM. According to Governor Asad, the GOI is not interacting with JAM, although there was no prohibition against, and the Government of Najaf is interacting politically with OMS.

According to Asad, the GOI's stock had risen since Basrah and the Sadrists were less popular than before, though action in Sadr City was still controversial. Asad mentioned that MAS had problems with his inner circle.

¶4. (C) The Governor opined that it was important to start planting the seeds of democracy. He also said that reconstruction and investment were important. He again repeated his view that he would like to see ninety percent of reconstruction projects targeted on rural areas so that the tribes would feel they belong to the province. According to Asad, the provincial government has a good bond with the tribes, but they are interested in "achievements."

¶5. (S) The Governor said he would be meeting with all leaders

of Najaf, including the southern regions of Saria, Madha, and Haidaria, to discuss security issues and ask for security cooperation. He noted that he had some reservations that the Chief of Police (COP) had not been firm enough in handling the situation in Najaf proper, but said that he would have to have a replacement COP ready before any action could be taken. But, he could and would put pressure on the present chief of police. BG Cardon responded that the Governor had been skillful in handling the situation. The General then made the following three points: (1) He noted that there was a chance that the special group leaders would come to Najaf but behave as normal citizens which would make it hard to work local warrants against them. (2) We are all excited about the moving of the PRT to Camp Endeavor in Najaf, which had been a decision that required considerable coordination within the USG, and that it was important that the security situation remain good. (3) We have seen that the Governor has been very consistent on security, and that there are differences of opinion on how hard to push at this time. BG Cardon noted that, with respect to Najaf, that would be his particular contribution -- to maintain regular consultation on security.

¶ 6. (S) TL noted to the Governor that he had previously said he would always be ready to meet with the Sadrists (but not/not members of JAM) if that would be helpful. The Governor responded that he had already sent a message through MP Dr. Liqa and wife of OMS Political Director and former Minister of Tourism that TL would be willing to meet. Governor Asad noted that he had not yet heard anything back, and opined that the current situation might delay a response.

¶ 7. (S) TL remarked that the Najaf PRT would soon be beginning locally based operations from FOB Endeavor in Najaf. Adding that Ambassador Crocker had been a strong supporter of moving the PRT from Hillah to Najaf, TL suggested that AMB Crocker might come to FOB Endeavor for a simple, low-key ceremony, at which a few Najaf leaders could attend. The Governor responded

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quickly that if AMB Crocker came to Najaf for an opening ceremony at FOB Endeavor, he would certainly want to invite AMB Crocker to the Governor's compound, show him around, and have a program for him. Note: Ambassador Ries addressed the opening of the PRT-supported Tourism Conference last week, and Embassy and PRT presence at Najaf Airport on May 10 was also covered by the press. End note. SIMMONS